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ABSTRACT

The District 10 Reading and Diagnostic Center was funded by a grant from the New York State Urban Education program. The staff includes a coordinator who is a reading specialist, two teachers, and four paraprofessionals. Children receive instruction in small groups of five or work individually with the machines and materials. The primary focus of the program is to serve second-grade children who are virtually nonreaders. An evaluation of the program was carried out through analysis of official records of the children in the program and a selected control group and through observations by qualified observers. Analysis of test results on 107 center children and 54 control children indicated an average gain in reading of 7 months for the center group versus an average gain of 2 months for the control group. Data gathered through observations and interviews also favored the program. Included in this report are a brief introduction to the program and its objectives, the evaluation design and procedures, the implementation of the program, and findings about the effectiveness of the program. It was recommended that the program be continued as it operated in the evaluation period. Tables are included. (AW)

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# AN EVALUATION OF THE STATE URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

# "READING DIAGNOSTIC CENTER"

# DISTRICT 10, NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION

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AN EVALUATION OF THE STATE URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM
"READING DIAGNOSTIC CENTER"

## A. INTRODUCTION

The District 10 Reading and Diagnostic Center was funded by a grant from the State Urban Education program. The coordinator of the program, a reading specialist, organized the center with the cooperation of two teachers. Four paraprofessionals under the guidance of the teachers were trained to work with groups of five youngsters at a time, for three periods a day. Schools affiliated with the program (P.S. 26, 32, 79, and 85) sent youngsters to the Reading Diagnostic Center twice a week; P.S. 46 sent youngsters to the center four times a week.

A brief summary of the program, extracted from the project proposal follows:

> The Center was staffed by licensed N.Y.C. teachers and four paraprofessional assistants who were given inservice training. The children selected were 120 second graders from 5 participating schools in the district. The children were recommended by supervisors, guidance counsellors, and teachers with the major criteria being non-reader. Four hundred children were screened. The staff used several screening techniques to assess reading level in the school for final selection. The children are bused to the Center twice weekly for one hour sessions from 4 schools. The children from the school in which the Center is housed receive instruction on four days. Center staff uses individual standardized and informal diagnostic materials to assess strengths and weaknesses. The Center is equipped with machines and materials for individualized instruction.

## B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

The primary focus of the program was to serve second grade children who were virtually non-readers. To accomplish this purpose it became necessary to:

1) diagnose possible deficit areas and to train the staff to this task.
2) offer remediation on the basis of whole group instruction, small group instruction and individualized instruction.
3) bring the youngster to level by the end of instruction or by the end of the school year.

While the primary purpose of the program was to teach non-reading children how to read, there were other goals that were met in seeking to attain the primary objective. Paraprofessionals were trained and brought into the professional training program, teachers learned new roles in terms of instruction. Several schools were involved in a cooperative effort. New programs, structures and scheduling procedures were developed.

## C. EVALUATION DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Evaluation of the Reading Diagnostic Center was designed and carried out with the cooperation of the coordinating teacher and the reading coordinator for District 10.

Official records of the youngsters in the program and in the control group were examined with regard to selection, progress in reading and other areas. Statistically, the progress of the youngsters in the program was measured by a pre-and post-test design utilizing the Spache Reading Diagnostic Scales and the Harris Word List as well as the Metropolitan Reading Scores administered on a group basis to the youngsters in the New York Schools. Children who were in the control group were selected in the same way that children in the program were selected, on the basis of being second graders who were non-readers and who were tested for entry into the program at the same time as the rest of the children at their respective school. However, for reasons of parental objection or because of the fact that there was not enough room in the Center for these youngsters, the children in the control group did not receive tutoring in the Reading and Diagnostic Center.

The objectives of the Evaluative Design were to: 1) determine the extent to which the program was implemented, 2) determine the adequacy of improving reading skills for the youngsters attending the Center, 3) determine the adequacy of the program for changing pupil attitudes, and 4) determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program and its implementation.

These objectives were to be determined by the following methods and procedures. First, an analysis of official records of the youngsters in the program and in the control group was done. Second, observations by qualified observers of the Center was carried out. Approximately 10 visits to the Center were made. Interviews with the teachers, supervisors, paraprofessionals, parents and students were held to determine results of the program. Some of these were informal and some utilized a questionnaire. An analysis of pupil attendance was undertaken. A list of materials and equipment for the Center was inventoried by the graduate assistants on the observation team. Questionnaires were directed to parents and participants in the program at the Center. Checklists were used as instruments for assessing children's social progress in the Center program.

These different kinds of information were collected and either analyzed statistically or more informally in the instances where the data did not lend itself to statistical treatment.

## D. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM

The Center was established at P.S. 46 because the surrounding schools had no space available for additional instruction programs. Therefore, P.S. 26, P.S. 32, P.S. 79 and P.S. 85 sent approximately 20 youngsters each to participate in the program on a twice weekly basis.

The scheduling of these programs was as follows:

1) Three one hour sessions per day, Monday through Thursday.
2) Four instruction groups per session consisting of five children per group.
3) The Friday program provided for the following activity:
   a. training of paraprofessionals
   b. visiting participating schools for discussions with teachers, guidance counselors, and supervisors,

c. preparation of materials.
d. record keeping, preparing plans for following week.
e. continuing evaluation.
f. meeting with parents.

4) Busing: Participating schools received schedules for children and busing transportation to and from the Center.

The Center was staffed by one professional teacher (actually two teachers each of whom worked half time, with one serving as the coordinating teacher) and four paraprofessional assistants. Whole group instruction was usually done by the professional teacher. Further, it was her responsibility to:

1) organize and supervise the program
2) train the paraprofessionals
3) meet with the supervisors and the classroom teachers
4) order the materials and equipment
5) prepare materials to meet the specific needs of the group
6) meet with parents

The children arrived at P.S. 46 from neighboring schools at 9:30 and at 10:30. P.S. 32 and 26 children came on Monday and Wednesday, and P.S. 85 and 79 children came on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. Thus the children from P.S. 32, 26, 85 and 79 received only two hours of Reading Center instruction each week. The same was not true of P.S. 46 children however, who received instruction every day, Monday through Thursday and thus received four hours of Reading Center instruction each week. Absence in the Reading Center program was not high. The children came with great regularity.

The paraprofessionals in the program had only high school education. In general, they were older, motherly women who resided in the neighborhood and know the youngsters who lived there. Thus good community rapport was one by-product of the program. The paraprofessionals kept thorough records on each of the children in their respective groups. They were exceedingly aware of any reading deficiency of each child in the group, thanks to the numerous diagnostic scales and checklists provided to them. Each paraprofessional kept individual plans for each youngster whom she was tutoring. The concern of the paraprofessional was particularly evident in the planning and in the individualization of much of the instruction.

The paraprofessionals prepared much of the material needed during the late afternoons and on Friday. Moreover, each day they had a planning session with the teacher-directors of the program.

The children were taught in groups of five; rarely were they taught as a large group. Frequently, the youngsters worked individually with machines and materials without interference from the teacher. All of them knew what to do and how to handle the equipment and materials designated for their use by the paraprofessional. Behavior problems were rare; although according to the attendance book, occasionally a child was dismissed due to behavioral difficulty. However, the thrust of the program was to treat reading difficulties and not behavioral problems.

The program began on October 8, 1969, although initial testing was done prior to that date. It terminated on approximately June 15, 1970. Nearly every child showed some progress.

## E. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAM

Data Gathered from Observation. Although the Center was located in an old school building, the classroom itself was warm and well-lit. The atmosphere was one of business-like preoccupation and interest. The children were all busy on their respective learning tasks.

The children were grouped according to ability. The materials in the program were innovative and not of the variety used in the regular classroom. Materials which seemed to be of greatest interest to the children were: First Talking Alphabet, with picture and record; the reading machine, the primer typewriter, the Time for Phonics Program, the Name and Know Book published by Bank Street, the Sullivan Materials and the teacher-prepared follow-up materials. Headsets and other mechanical materials seemed to have a special appeal for children. Careful log and plan books on all of these activities were kept by the paraprofessional. Children were aware of the interest and planning done by their respective teachers and were reluctant to disappoint them in any way. The observers were impressed by the record keeping system and the intense interest on the part of the paraprofessional. Although the observers were anxious to interview the teachers, the paraprofessionals and the children, in nearly every case of visitation, they indicated a reluctance to interfere with the intensity of the instructional program, although observers did not feel that their presence was resented or unwelcome. (It should be mentioned here that each observer telephoned for an appointment before visiting the center; thus in no case was the visit entirely unexpected.)

The instructional program utilized a variety of approaches. The coordinating teacher indicated that she would try one method and if it worked, then she used it for a while; if it did not, she proceeded to another method which did. Nearly every technique met with some success with some children; it would have been difficult to say which materials were most effective. These findings, of course, parallel those of other researchers in the field.

This variety and frequent change of materials were important in capturing the interest of youngsters with a short attention span and low motivation with regard to reading.

At the end of each session, a family worker escorted the children downstairs (four flights) to take the children back to the school from which they had been bused to participate in the program.

Data Gathered through Interviews. The coordinating teacher felt that the greatest strength of the program was the fact that the children received so much individualized attention. The experience of achieving success where failure had been so prevalent previously played a vital role in each child's progress. She would like to see the program expanded and new materials purchased. She worked vigorously with teacher aids and the working-planning session an essential part of the program. She reported that the visual memory cards and the worksheets for each sound developed by the Center staff had proved to be most helpful.

Teacher aides almost unanimously felt that the chief benefit of the program was that they could see the progress of each youngster. They like working with small groups and with individuals. During the training sessions with the coordinating teacher, they learned how to let the children talk and how to use

experience charts, how to teach phonics, and how to work on the comprehension skills. Some felt that they did not have enough time with the children to use all the materials that they would like to use, but the low adult-pupil ratio was of tremendous value in teaching skills. They liked the huge variety of materials, and they appreciated the fact that they did not have to "manufacture" all the materials that they used.

For the most part, the children in the program were far too busy to take time out to be interviewed. Most of the information concerning their attitudes had to be ascertained by observation of their interest in the program, which was manifest in all but a very few cases. Interviews with pupils would have interfered with the progress of the class, and it was not considered appropriate to take children away from their lessons to talk to them. Moreover, as soon as class was over, the children had to be bused back to their respective schools.

Analysis of Test Results. Thorough records were kept on the children. Although some children were not able to be retested, and some dropped out of the program, it proved to be possible to identify 107 children in the Center Group and 54 in the Control Group. The selection process for these children has been described above. Most of the children selected were virtual non-readers and thus started from a common base. This was true of the control group as well.

Relevant data concerning the relative growth of children in the Center and control group are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Mean Growth in Reading (in Months) of Center and Control Group Children

| School | Center Group N | Center Group Mean | Control Group N | Control Group Mean | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P.S. 79 | 18 | 4.0 | 13 | 1.2 | 1.96 |
| P.S. 26 | 18 | 6.4 | 8 | 2.9 | 2.37* |
| P.S. 85 | 20 | 8.4 | 8 | 0.9 | 2.25* |
| P.S. 32 | 19 | 6.6 | 14 | 2.6 | 2.96** |
| P.S. 46 | 32 | 7.9 | 11 | 1.3 | 3.54** |
| Total | 107 | 6.9 | 54 | 1.8 | 5.62** |

* Statistically significant at .05 level
** Statistically significant at .01 level

The average gain in reading for the Center Group was nearly seven months versus a gain in reading of almost two months in the control group. In effect the two months gain for the non-participants means that they remained non-readers, while the children who studied in the program gained enough to become second grade readers.

On a breakdown by school, the children from P.S. 79 at the Center gained four months in reading ability while the control group gained a little over a month. The children at the Center from P.S. 26 gained six and one-half months while the nonparticipants from that school gained only three months. The children from P.S. 85 who came to the Center gained eighth and one-half months while their

non-participant counterparts from that school gained less than one month in reading ability. The children attending the Center from P.S. 32 gained six and one-half months while their counterparts in the regular classroom gained two and one-half months in reading ability. The children from P.S. 46 who attended the Center (twice as often as children from the other schools) gained nearly 8 months in reading ability while their counterparts gained only a little over one month. In all but one instance, the difference in growth was significant in favor of the Center group.

The children averaged different numbers of months in the program due to the fact that some were dismissed to return to class upon achieving grade level reading ability. It is interesting to compare the average number of months in the program of the children with their average number of months of reading achievement.

| School | No. of Months | No. of Months Read. Achiev. |
|---|---|---|
| P.S. 79 | 8.0 | 4.0 |
| P.S. 26 | 8.0 | 6.5 |
| P.S. 85 | 7.5 | 8.5 |
| P.S. 32 | 8.0 | 6.5 |
| P.S. 46 | 6.5 | 8.0 |

## F. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is difficult to see how the program could be improved upon. Certainly for the expenditure of the monies ($24,459 per year) the program is an outstanding success. For these monies one has purchased a Reading Center supplied with a variety of interesting remedial reading materials, two half-time teachers who are fully qualified and four to five outstandingly dedicated paraprofessional staff members who have taught almost without exception (there were two children who did not seem to make any progress at the Center) 113 to read who might not have learned to read otherwise.

The children showed high interest, good motivation and excellent morale in the program.

To have rescued this number of youngsters from the morass of illiteracy and its attendant problems is something of a miracle in itself. To do so at this bargain basement expenditure is a genuine feat of remarkable proportions. The fact that some children did not achieve a reading level proportionate to the number of months of attendance in the program is due probably to the limited number of days per week that they attended the program. Had they all attended 4 days a week as did the children from P.S. 46, they doubtless would have achieved more.

The recommendation of the evaluator would simply be more, more, more, of the same kind of program with more of the same kind of materials, the same kind of inspired staff with its relationships of commarderie and good will, and an extension of the program to each grade level in each school. This type of diagnostic and remedial program should be implemented at every grade level where

non-readers or poorly achieving readers are found.

Indeed, one is tempted to advocate that the program should be adopted across the city. However, one of the intangible qualities which probably gave the program its outstanding success was the fact that every person in the program was so very dedicated, so very concerned with children and so hard-working. Time and again, it was obvious that the teachers were concerned and giving far beyond what they were being paid for. The paraprofessionals in the program were badly underpaid and yet they were highly motivated and very anxious to do a good job. The coordinating teacher undertook statistical analysis and testing far beyond what the duties of what her job called for. The District Reading Coordinator was always on hand when a request was made and frequently arrived at the center to counsel her staff. In short, the nearly unqualified success of the program may reside in the fact that everyone affiliated with it seemed to be passionately concerned with the children's and hence the program's success.